

ALCOA-NEW KENSINGTON WORKS
(Pittsburgh Reduction Company)
(Schreiber Industrial Park)
Aluminum Company of America
Ninth Street to Sixteenth Street
adjacent to Allegheny River
New Kensington
Westmoreland County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-337

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65-NEKEN,
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location: Ninth Street to Sixteenth Street,
adjacent to Allegheny River, New
Kensington, Westmoreland, Pennsylvania

Date of Construction: 1891

Designer/Engineer: Unknown

Builder/Fabricator: Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA)

Present Owner: Various owners

Present Use: Mixed, light industrial

Significance: The former Aluminum Company of America's
(Alcoa) New Kensington Works was
established in 1891 by Charles M. Hall's
Pittsburgh Reduction Company, and it was
this concern's first major aluminum-
producing plant outside of Pittsburgh.
The Pittsburgh Reduction Company,
reorganized and renamed Alcoa in 1907,
was the nation's first major producer of
aluminum and aluminum products.

Project Information:

The results of the study of Westmoreland County were published in 1994: Edward K. Muller, Ronald C. Carlisle, principal contract historians; Gray Fitzsimons, Kenneth D. Rose, editors, Westmoreland County Pennsylvania: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites (Washington, D.C.: America's Industrial Heritage Project and Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, Department of the Interior).

The contents of this publication were transmitted to the Library of Congress in report form. Research notes, field photos and copies of historic photos collected during the project were transmitted to the AIHP Collection, Special Collections, Stapleton Library, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705.

HISTORY

The New Kensington Works of Alcoa extends along the Allegheny River and is bordered by Ninth Street to the south and Sixteenth Street to the north. A railroad spur, formerly owned by the Pennsylvania Railroad, runs north-to-south through the plant. A narrow road called Pine Alley runs north-south and defines the easternmost extent of the Alcoa plant, which is now known as the Schreiber Industrial Park.

The City of New Kensington was established by Pittsburgh real estate speculators who had incorporated as the Burrell Improvement Company. The site of the aluminum factory was on property acquired from this firm. Comprising three-and-a-half acres, the factory site was a strip of land bounded on the east by the Indian Run Branch of the Allegheny Valley Railroad and south to north from the Brownsville Plate Glass Company property to Eleventh Street. (The Burrell Improvement Company was successful in attracting other firms besides the Pittsburgh Reduction Company. The new companies that moved to New Kensington included the Excelsior Glass Works, Sterling White Lead Company, Bradley Stove Company, Hunt Air Brake Works, Pennsylvania Tin Plate Company, Glenn Drilling Company and Chambers' Glass Works.) In five years, from 1890 to 1895, the population of New Kensington increased from 200 to 10,000.

The original works of the Pittsburgh Reduction Company (later Alcoa) in New Kensington stood at the southern end of the plant. This works was begun in 1891 with facilities for producing aluminum. However, none of these production buildings survive. Aluminum production ceased at New Kensington in 1896 when a new facility was built at Niagara Falls, New York, a site chosen because of its inexpensive and plentiful supply of electricity. (It takes about ten kilowatt hours of electric power to produce a single pound of aluminum.) New Kensington continued to supply alumina to the Niagara Falls plant, but in 1902 this production was transferred to a new plant at East St. Louis, Illinois.

By 1900 the New Kensington plant, now encompassing over fifteen acres, concentrated on metal fabrication and manufacture of new products, including special alloys, ingots, casting, sheets, rod and bars, cooking utensils, and job shop items. Cooking utensils were first produced in 1900 on the second floor of the old Excelsior Glass building, and the United States Aluminum Company was incorporated in 1901 to manufacture the cooking utensils with the Aluminum Cooking Utensil Company formed to sell them. This arrangement continued until 1925 when the Aluminum Cooking Utensil Company took over manufacturing as well as sales. These two companies employed 3,834 workers.

In 1971 Alcoa closed the New Kensington Works. Now operated under the auspices of the Schreiber Industrial District, the factory complex contains a variety of manufacturing concerns, including the Allegheny Valley Heat Treating Company, the American Drawn Steel Company, the Cannon Boiler Works, and a furniture-making and warehousing concern. A number of buildings are in poor condition and are slated for demolition.

Buildings located within the New Kensington works include:

Finishing and Shipping Building

The earliest surviving building at the works dates from this era: it is the six-story Finishing and Shipping Building, which remains the tallest factory building in the plant. It contains a wood frame, common-bond brick walls, flat-arched windows, and a stone foundation. The building is missing its roof and is in poor condition. By about 1900 it was doubled in size with a symmetrical addition to the north. Of identical construction, this addition is also in poor condition and both sections are slated for demolition.

Steam Plant

East of the Cooking Utensil Department between Tenth and Eleventh Streets is the defunct Steam Plant. Built in the early 1900s, this plant retains its boiler house, a tall brick building, and brick chimney, which rises 125' in height. Attached to the Steam Plant is a large steel-frame conveyor used for removing ashes from the boiler house.

Heat-Treating Department

During the Second World War, Alcoa's New Kensington Works was expanded dramatically for the production of both aluminum cookware and aluminum alloy tools. In addition to constructing a large machine shop Alcoa installed a Heat-Treating Department in 1942. This department was established near the machine shop along Eleventh Street in 1942 in the old Laboratory and Print Shop, which was originally constructed about 1910. The building housing the heat-treating department is an unprepossessing one-story brick building with sawtooth monitors, but is somewhat notable as Alcoa's main laboratory in New Kensington prior to the construction of the nearby Henry Hornbostle designed Alcoa Research Laboratory. By 1942, when part of the building served as an office for the Heat-Treating Department, Alcoa installed four gas furnaces for heat treating aluminum alloy tool steel; these furnaces remain in place. Adjoining the old laboratory building is the heat-treating furnace building, a one-story steel-frame structure erected in 1942. It contains a gable-roof monitor and houses three Stewart heat-treating furnaces manufactured by the Chicago Flexible Shaft Company. One of these heat-treating

furnaces is still used. Currently, the Allegheny Valley Heat Treating Company occupies these buildings.

Alcoa built a number of other additions during World War II including a large four-story brick and steel-frame building, which probably served as a job shop and finishing department. It stands at the foot of Twelfth Street, just north of the Polishing and Stamping Department.

Blacksmith Shop

The Blacksmith Shop, a one-and two-story brick building with a gable-roof monitor, was probably built in the late 1890s and has been extensively remodeled.

Packing and Job Shop

As part of its Cooking Utensil Department, the Pittsburgh Reduction Company erected about 1900 the Packing and Job Shop, a two-story brick building. This building measures approximately 200' x 50'. It now houses the works of the American Drawn Steel Company.

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